

U.S. VETERANS HOSPITAL, JEFFERSON BARRACKS, CHAPEL
(Veterans Administration Facility, Jefferson Barracks, Building No. 64)
(Veterans Administration Hospital, Jefferson Barracks)
(Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Jefferson Barracks
Division)
VA Medical Center, Jefferson Barracks Division
1 Jefferson Barracks Drive
Saint Louis
Independent City
Missouri

HABS MO-1943-AC
MO-1943-AC

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

U.S. VETERANS HOSPITAL, JEFFERSON BARRACKS, CHAPEL (BUILDING 64)

HABS No. MO-1943-AC

Location: Building 64, VA Medical Center, 1 Jefferson Barracks Drive,
St. Louis, Missouri
USGS Quadrangle Oakville, Missouri
UTM Coordinates 16 7258230 E 9965384 N

Date of Construction: 1952

Designer: Jamieson and Spearl, Architects and Engineers, St. Louis, Mo.

Contractor: Unknown

Present Owner: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: The Chapel was constructed as part of a project to expand the U.S. Veterans Hospital, Jefferson Barracks, to accommodate veterans of World War II and the Korean War. The building served as the chapel for the hospital from its completion in 1952 until its closure in 2004. The chapel filled an important role in the social life of the hospital, and its stained glass reflects a high level of craftsmanship.

Project Information: This project was sponsored and funded by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs as mitigation for the demolition of buildings at the St. Louis VA Medical Center, Jefferson Barracks Division, a property that has been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places via consensus determination of eligibility between the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs as mitigation for the demolition of buildings at the St. Louis VA Medical and the Missouri Department of Natural Resources State Historic Preservation Office.

Description:

The Chapel (Building 64) is a brick-clad gabled facility. The building has a stark modernistic design, but several features of the exterior reflect traditional ecclesiastical design: capped buttresses, gabled end walls, and oculus windows. The interior of the chapel is fairly intact and is laid out with a long nave space with pews, and a chancel. The interior also contains stained glass, original lighting fixtures, and some original woodwork. The Chapel is situated in the west-central portion of the hospital complex, on a grass lawn. The south side of the chapel faces the Admissions Building (Building 50), the east side of the chapel faces grass lawn and connector tunnel structures, and the north and west sides both face asphalt parking lots.

The Chapel was designed to be entered primarily through an enclosed above-ground corridor structure that connects the Chapel to other facilities at the medical center, enabling patients to be transferred from one building to another without going outdoors. This connector structure is attached to the east wall of the chapel vestibule, in the spot where a formal entrance portal would normally be located. The chapel lobby does have a door to the exterior, but it is a plain set of double doors positioned in a somewhat obscure location on the north side of the vestibule; this door does not serve as a formal entranceway. As a result, the chapel does not have a formal facade where a prominent central entranceway offers access to an interior lobby from the outside. The four exterior walls of the building are therefore described here without reference to a facade, since the building appears to have been designed without one. The following description begins with the east wall, which has the connector that provides primary access from other hospital buildings.

The east wall of the Chapel's gabled main worship space has a stained-glass oculus window trimmed with limestone; other trim on this wall includes a wood raking cornice and a small louvered ventilator at the peak of the gable. A small, low, flat-roof vestibule also sits on the building's east end. This vestibule has two small square windows on its east wall and a plain metal double door on its north wall. The corridor structure that connects the Chapel to other buildings at the medical center is attached to the east wall of the vestibule.

The Chapel's south wall has six rectangular stained-glass windows and five deep brick buttresses with stone caps. This wall also contains a short one-story section on the west end that is part of the administrative wing of the building; this one-story section is flat-roofed with yellow brick walls, a three-light metal awning window, and a limestone parapet.

The west wall of the Chapel features a shorter section that is the administrative wing, and a taller portion that belongs to the main chapel space. The west wall of the administrative wing has yellow brick except for an area that is framed by a rectangle of limestone trim.

The framed area contains orange brick veneer and four double-hung metal replacement windows. The taller portion of the west wall is gabled, with a limestone-trimmed stained-glass oculus window, and a gable with wood raking cornice.

The north wall has a short (western) portion that is part of the administrative wing, and a taller (eastern) portion that is part of the main chapel. The western portion of the north wall has yellow brick walls and two double-hung metal replacement windows. This section of the wall also has a thin stone coping at the top of the wall. The eastern portion of the north wall is composed mainly of the side wall of the main chapel space, and has six rectangular stained-glass windows and four deep brick buttresses with stone caps. The eastern end of the north wall also includes a small brick flat-roof entrance vestibule with an aluminum and glass replacement double door, stone trim and coping, and a mix of orange and yellow brick.

The interior of the building includes the main chapel space and an administrative wing with corridors and offices. The main chapel space contains a rectangular nave (seating area) with the chancel at the east end and the entrance vestibule at the south end. The chapel's seating space once had two rows of oak pews divided by a main central aisle, with two narrower side aisles next to each of the nave walls. However, one row of pews had been removed at the time of fieldwork, presumably to save the pews from water damage related to a roof leak. The floor in the center and side aisles is covered with carpeting. The walls of the main chapel space are composed of plaster, and the ceiling has two sections of plaster and a higher recessed center with acoustical ceiling tiles.

The plaster north and south walls of the nave contain stained glass windows but are otherwise not articulated with any trim or paneling. A small wallpaper border has been installed below the stained glass windows on both the north and south walls of the nave, but this border is a fairly recent addition to the chapel's decorative scheme. In the nave, eight identical lighting fixtures hang from the ceiling, suspended with chains. These fixtures are six-sided vertical metal and glass lamps with a pointed-arch pattern worked into each side of each lamp.

The chancel area of the main chapel space is like a shallow stage, raised slightly higher than the seating area in the nave. The current visual focus of the chancel is the oculus stained-glass window on the east wall, framed in an arch motif composed of vertical cuts of wood that extend down to the floor. The wood trim of the arch motif extends up to frame the oculus window, and the vertical cuts of wood are positioned directly below the oculus. Most of the original chancel furnishings have been removed, so the chancel was largely empty at the time of fieldwork. The chancel floor is covered in plain carpeting that dates to the last fifteen years.

The nave's stained-glass windows on the main chapel's north and south walls are a mix of opalescent and cathedral glass and have geometrical patterns forming several cross motifs.

The dominant colors of these windows are red, blue, and brown, and the windows are largely identical in design and colors. The two oculus windows on the north and south walls of the main chapel space have colors similar to the windows on the north and south walls. However, the oculus windows are more elaborate; both contain painted panels representing Judeo-Christian religious symbols, including a menorah, numbered tablets representing the Ten Commandments, a crown, a torch, a book, lilies, and an anchor.

The office and administrative wing of the chapel contains corridors and a series of small rooms. This area of the building features gypsum-board walls, carpeted floors, drop acoustical-tile ceilings and fluorescent lighting. These rooms include two small offices on the building's west side that were once used as chaplain offices. The south side of the building features a smaller room, a larger room, and a closet. The administrative area also features a larger room on the building's east side that is of sufficient size that it could have been used for small meetings and religious services. This east room contains one small rectangular stained-glass window that is similar in its colors and geometrical design to the large stained glass windows on the south and north walls of the nave. This window has a brown glass Greek cross pattern, and at the center of the cross is a Eucharistic motif depicting a chalice and a host.

History:

The Chapel's construction is related to a post-World War II conversion of the VA Hospital at Jefferson Barracks from a general medicine facility to a neuropsychiatric hospital. With the end of the war, a large number of veterans required medical and psychiatric treatment, and to address this situation in St. Louis, the VA constructed the John Cochran Hospital downtown for general medicine, and converted the existing Jefferson Barracks facility (south of the city) to a neuropsychiatric hospital. The John Cochran Hospital was built in the late 1940s and early 1950s, while initial new construction and remodeling for the neuropsychiatric facility was carried out at Jefferson Barracks from 1950 to 1952.

1940s Mental Health Reform and Post-World War II VA Neuropsychiatric Hospital Design

The conversion of the Jefferson Barracks facility to a modern neuropsychiatric hospital was related to a wave mental health reform at the end of World War II. Public demands for improved conditions were stoked by a 1946 article in *Life* magazine, written by medical writer Albert Q. Maisel. Entitled "Bedlam 1946: Most of U.S. Mental Hospitals Are a Shame and a Disgrace," the article exposed shocking abuses in mental hospitals.¹ By 1947, as part of an effort to build new VA hospitals, Dr. Paul Haun, a psychiatrist with the VA's

¹ Albert Q. Maisel, "Bedlam 1946: Most of U.S. Mental Hospitals Are a Shame and a Disgrace," *Life*, May 6, 1946, 102-118.

Washington D.C. office, developed the “Schematic Plan for a 1,000-Bed VA Hospital,” a general plan for psychiatric hospital facilities that recommended the types of buildings to be provided, as well as the number of floors and other details. This plan was publicized in the article “New Trends in Hospital Design,” by Haun and Dr. Z. M. Lebensohn, in the February 1948 edition of *The American Journal of Psychiatry*.²

Haun’s designs emphasized the importance of recreational and occupational training activities, and he tried to reduce the stigma of psychiatric hospitalization by making the facilities resemble resorts or college campuses.³ He recommended that each psychiatric hospital should have a multi-story admissions and intensive treatment building to handle both the initial observation and diagnosis of newly arrived patients and the various forms of intensive psychiatric treatment that followed the diagnosis. Haun favored the multi-story layout because it allowed doctors quick, easy access to patients and also made it easier to contain the patients and secure the facility. Patients would stay in this building for no more than four to six months.⁴ If intensive treatment was not effective, the patient would be transferred out of the admissions and intensive treatment building and into one of several long-term care buildings for continued treatment. In contrast to the admissions and treatment building, Haun recommended that the continued treatment buildings should be low, sprawling structures of only one or two floors, which would allow patients easier passage to outdoor activities, an important part of Haun’s treatment philosophy.⁵

The Function of the Chapel at Jefferson Barracks

A freestanding chapel building was part of the Haun and Lebensohn schematic plan for VA hospitals included in the 1948 article, and a chapel appears to have been a high priority at Jefferson Barracks. In developing the neuropsychiatric hospital at Jefferson Barracks, the VA’s gave first priority to construction of facilities necessary for clinical treatment—psychiatric treatment buildings and the necessary utility and food service support buildings were completed at Jefferson Barracks by 1952. However, recreational facilities such as the Special Services Building (with its theater, billiards, and bowling facilities) and the Therapeutic Exercise Building (with its pool and exercise areas) were not designed and built until 1955-1957. Although it was not directly involved in the hospital’s program of psychiatric treatment, the Chapel was designed and built as part of the initial 1950-1952 wave of construction.

Construction drawings for the Chapel were drawn up by Jamieson and Pearl, Architects and Engineers, along with drawings for other Jefferson Barracks buildings, in January

² Paul Haun and Z. M. Lebensohn, “New Trends in Hospital Design,” *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 104, no. 8 (February 1948): 555-564.

³ Ibid., 564.

⁴ Ibid., 557-559.

⁵ Ibid., 555-564.

1950. Jamieson and Spearl was founded in St. Louis in 1918 when James Jamieson partnered with George Spearl. The firm was notable for designing major buildings at several colleges and universities across the Midwest, including ones at Washington University in St. Louis. Jamieson died in 1941, before the firm did work at the VA Hospital, Jefferson Barracks, but the firm continued to use the name Jamieson and Spearl into the 1950s.⁶

Original plans for the chapel show a small narthex that served as the main entrance. This narthex was entered from other buildings at the medical center via a connecting corridor structure, so the chapel was originally designed to fit into the hospital's corridor system. However, the narthex also included a door that opened to the outside. The narthex area also included restroom facilities. The nave, which formed the primary seating area for the chapel, was long and narrow with a single aisle down the center. The plans show two rows of thirteen pews in each row, providing 156 seats. The rear of the nave also included two large areas of empty space intended for wheelchair seating; this arrangement would have been especially necessary due to the presence of patients who were elderly or who had suffered spinal cord injuries.⁷

The chapel's chancel space was a raised platform and originally contained a fairly large quantity of furnishings. The original arrangement included a central altar on the west wall of the building, plus a pulpit on the north side of the chancel and a lectern on the south. The chancel was separated from the nave by a railing with a series of square openings. Chancel railings were, at the time, a common feature of Catholic churches and those of some Protestant denominations. Construction drawings show that the railing stretched across the entire chancel, with a gate in the center. The chancel also contained two sets of pews that faced the center of the chancel and were used for choir members. The drawings also show that a sliding altar platform on rollers could be extended and retracted at the center of the chancel, thereby providing an altar surface for Catholic mass that could be retracted during Protestant services.⁸ Overall, the chancel seems to have been designed to accommodate both Protestant services and Catholic mass.

The inclusion of features such as the chancel railing and an altar attached to the wall reflect that the chapel was designed in the 1950s, well before the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) were applied to worship spaces used for Catholic mass; once the Vatican II reforms were adopted in the mid-to-late 1960s, worship spaces for Catholic churches were generally designed without chancel railings, and with a freestanding table-like altar that was not mounted to a back wall so the priest could face the congregation.

⁶ Esley Hamilton, *National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination Form for the Washington University Hilltop Campus Historic District*, 1978, on file at the Missouri State Historic Preservation Office.

⁷ Jamieson and Spearl, Architects and Engineers, *Construction Drawings for 544-Bed Neuropsychiatric Hospital, Chapel*, 1950, on file at St. Louis VA Medical Center, Jefferson Barracks Division, Building 3T.

⁸ Ibid.

Small rooms next to the chancel provided additional spaces. A choir room with an organ was located on the south side of the chancel, and two rooms on the north side of the chancel formed the office facilities for the chaplains. West of (behind) the chancel, the plan included a sacristy equipped with confessional booths and a small utility space labeled as the pump room.⁹

The Chapel continued to serve the VA Medical Center through the mid-1960s. In 1965, a fire in the building caused \$8,000-10,000 in damage to the interior.¹⁰ The chapel was repaired and continued to serve the needs of the medical center through the early twenty-first century. Windows in the administrative area were replaced in 1982 as part of a multi-building window replacement project at the medical center.¹¹ The current traditional stained glass in the chapel does not appear on the original construction drawings of the building, and appears to have been added at an unknown date to enhance the facility.

The chapel for the medical center was officially closed in February 2004, and the Chapel is currently not in use. All chancel furniture has been removed, as have half of the pews, presumably to avert water damage from a roof leak. Current redevelopment plans for the Jefferson Barracks medical center to be carried out in the next several years call for the demolition of the Chapel and re-use of the land for new facilities for the medical center.

Sources:

Hamilton, Esley. *National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination Form for the Washington University Hilltop Campus Historic District*. 1978. On file at the Missouri State Historic Preservation Office, Jefferson City.

Haun, Paul, and Z. M. Lebensohn. "New Trends in Hospital Design" *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 104, no. 8 (February 1948).

Jamieson and Spearl, Architects and Engineers. *Construction Drawings for 544-Bed Neuropsychiatric Hospital, Chapel*. 1950. On file at St. Louis VA Hospital, Jefferson Barracks Division, Building 3T.

Maisel, Albert Q. "Bedlam 1946: Most of U.S. Mental Hospitals Are a Shame and a Disgrace." *Life*, May 6, 1946.

St. Louis Globe-Democrat. "Hospital Chapel Damaged by Fire." September 10, 1965.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ "Hospital Chapel Damaged by Fire." *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, September 10, 1965.

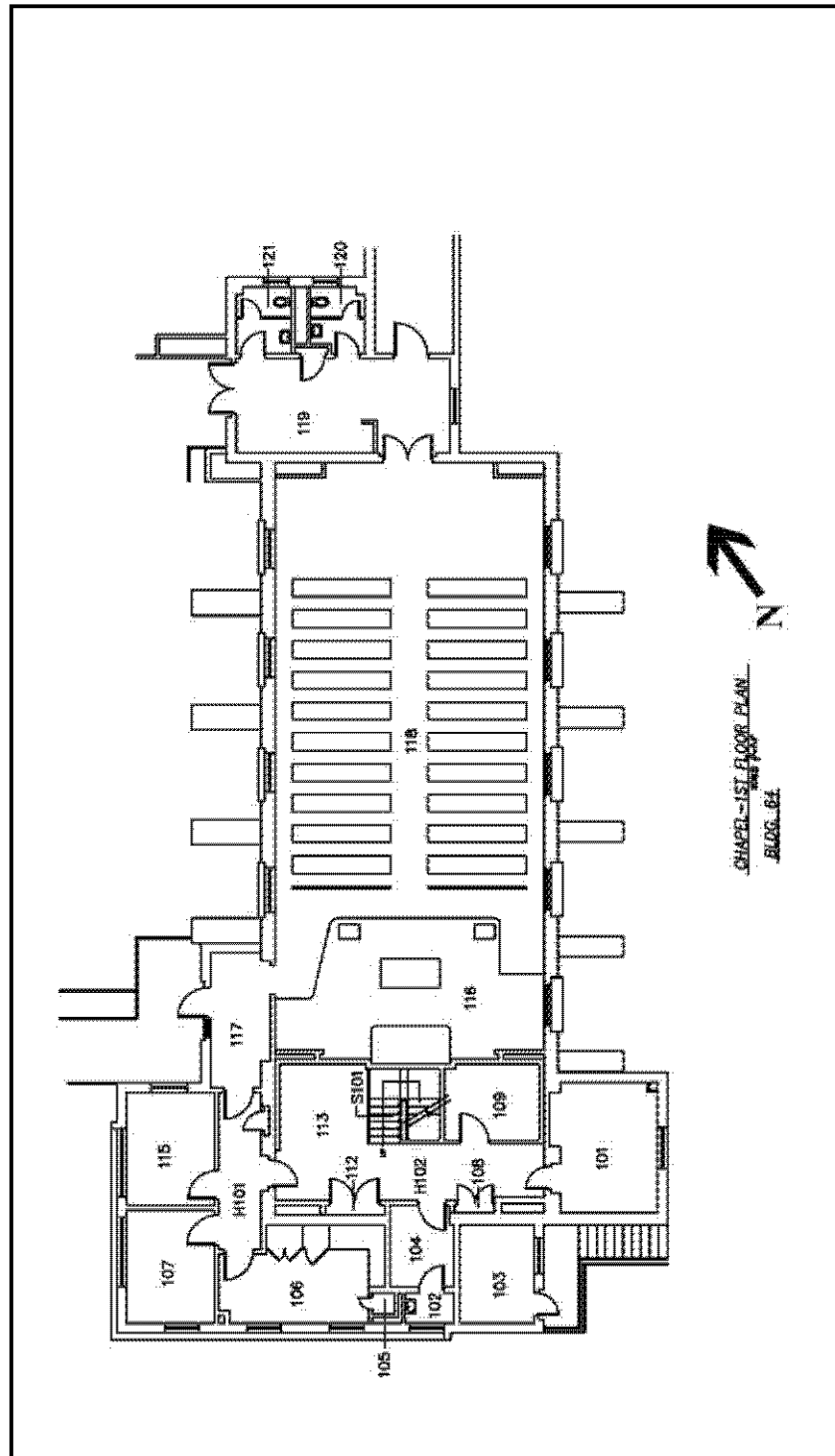
¹¹ U.S. Veterans Administration, Construction drawing files for Building 64, 1950-2010, on file at St. Louis VA Medical Center, Jefferson Barracks Division, Building 3T.

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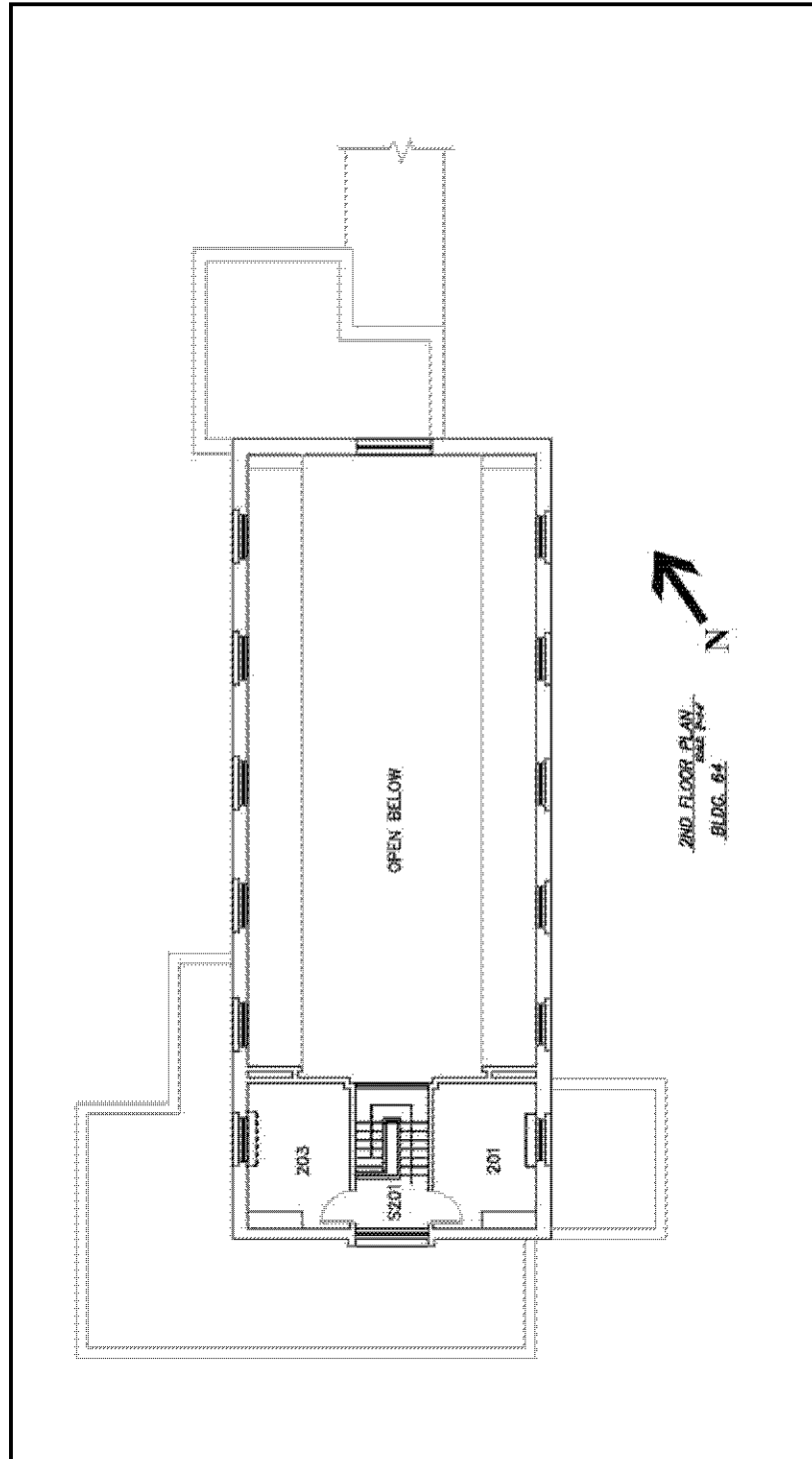
U.S. Veterans Administration. Construction drawing files for Building 64, St. Louis VA
Medical Center, Jefferson Barracks Division. 1950-2010. On file at St. Louis VA
Medical Center, Jefferson Barracks Division, Building 3T.

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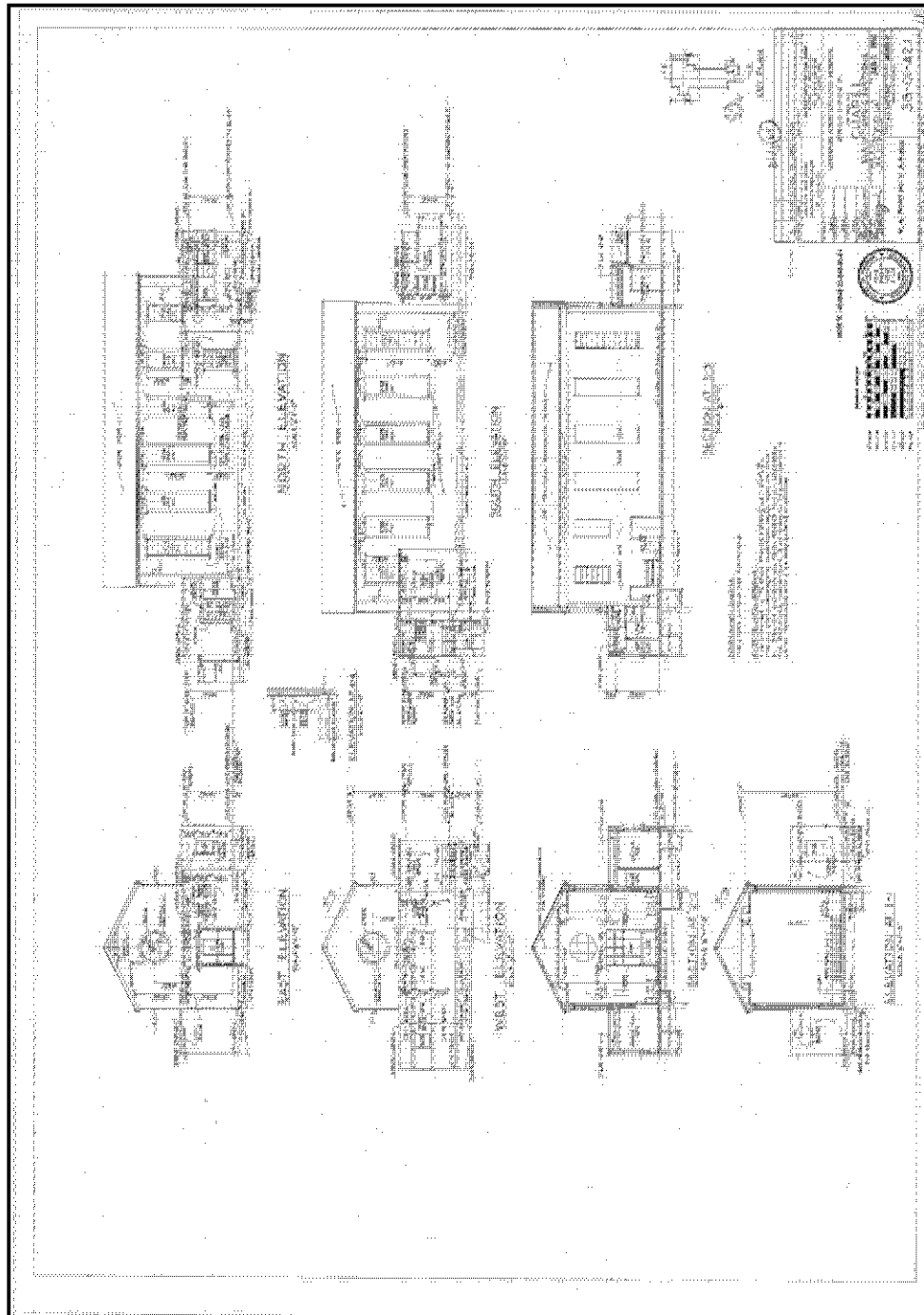


Chapel (Building 64), current floor plan for first floor



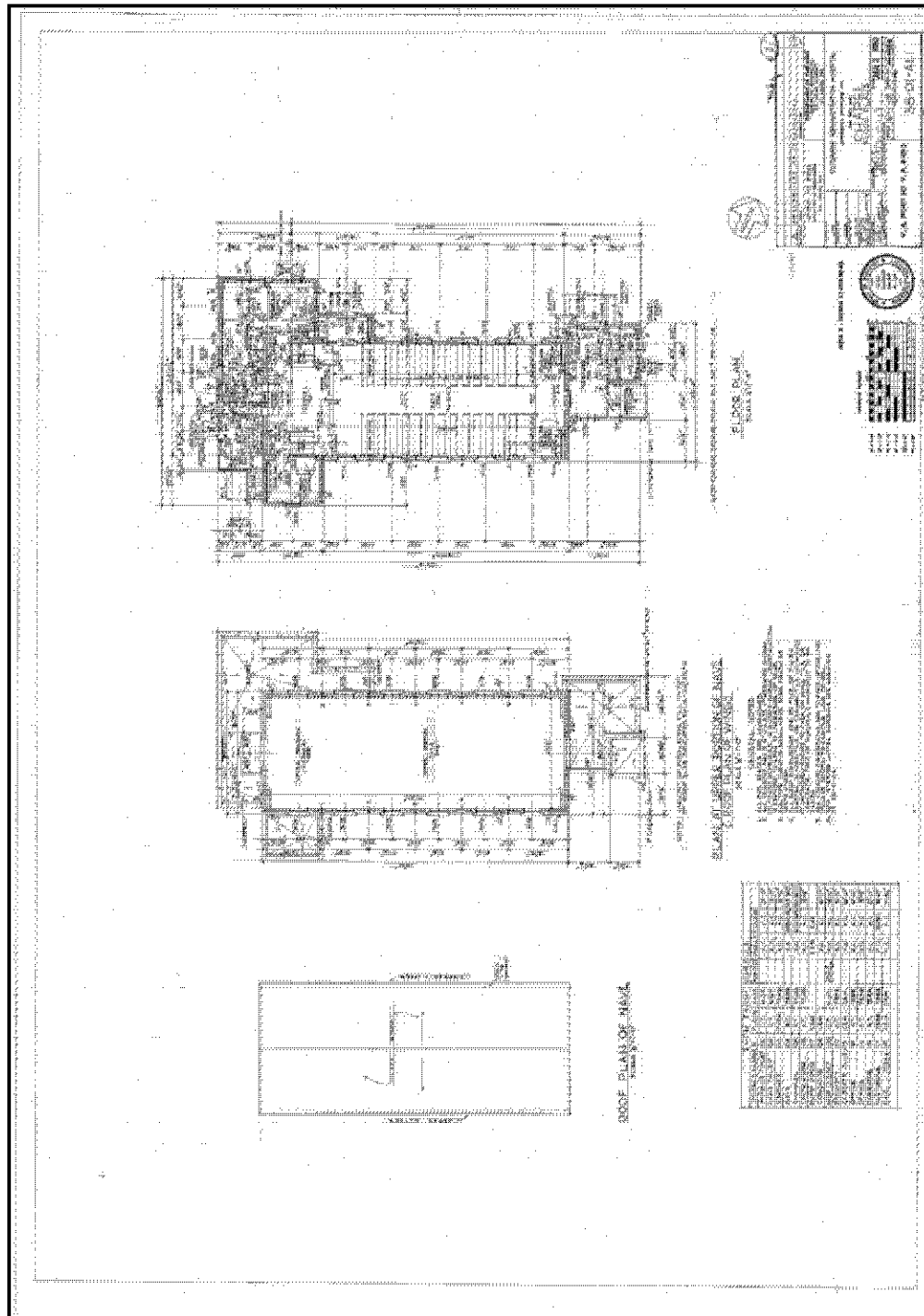
Chapel (Building 64), current floor plan for second floor

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Original elevations for the Chapel (Building 64), 1950

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Original plans for the Chapel (Building 64), 1950